a penny for your thoughts

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Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Relationship:
Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku

Character:
Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Midoriya Izuku, Eri (My Hero Academia), Bakugou Katsuki, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Class 1-A (My Hero Academia)

Additional Tags:
Parental Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Hurt/Comfort, Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Midoriya Izuku Needs A Hug, Midoriya Izuku Swears, Let Midoriya Izuku Swear, Protective Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Quirk Accident (My Hero Academia), Quirk Discrimination (My Hero Academia), Quirkless Discrimination (My Hero Academia), Bakugou Katsuki is Bad at Feelings, and I don't mean in a fun way, Implied/Referenced Suicide, Implied/Referenced Self-Harm, Suicidal Thoughts, Self-Harm, Panic Attacks

Language:
English

Series:
Part 9 of author's favorites

Collections:
Read it and weep, You haven't lived if you haven't read this, Catlady5001's Favorite Fanfics, Bnha Bookclub Discord Recs, Got 99

problems but these ain't one, Reading is one form of escape. Running for your life is another., Aizawa Being a Dad, ☆ Little Red's BNHA Library ☆, The Witch's Woods, Nice is in pain and it's your fault, There are no words for this beauty, these would be the prom queens if crying was a contest, love and big apprish to the writers and betas of these pieces, phoenix's my hero academia - best fics, Cloudy with a Chance of great fics, Creative Chaos Discord Recs, Best Fics Ever, 🌳 Izuku and his emotional support dads 🌳, SakurAlpha's Fic Rec of Pure how did you create this you amazing bean, Amazing Reads and Inspiration for BNHA, Quirk Induced Angst, Fave Fics Found, A Picky Reader's Top Picks, mars's bnha fanfiction library, best bnha fics i've had the privilege of reading, Love these stuff UwU, I suffer from this condition called having good taste, the perfect fic doesn't exi-, Martian's Delights, 🌳Izuku and his Collection of Dads🌳, bnha fics i dream about 🌙, Void's BNHA Favorites :D, Orbit's Fics To Reread, The Unitary, My Hero Complete Fics, bnha fics that were too good <3, MHA Chaotic Energy 3000, Sodium's favourites, BNHA BEST SHORT STORIES TO EVER GRACE THE INTERNET, ☆ <100k Fav Fics Bnha ☆, Genius bnha fanfics, bumblebee's fav BNHA fics! :-D, Dadzawa, FreakingAmazingFavorites, misc favourite fic, fuck canon all my homies hate canon, All The Dadzawa Things, Aspen's only love, Myra_Approved_Version_of_Midoriya_Izuku, The Precious Broccoli Boi Can Be Scary, Completed Fics ✓, MHAfavorites, BNHA Shorty Squad, my fav bnha fics :D, Aizawa and Izuku Mentor-Parent Fics, Lex's Favorite BNHA Fics ٩(●˙▿˙●)۶, T.S.S (This shit slaps), Fanfiction ***I*** Deem Worthy Of The Name, Quality Fics, Fics that Prove Fanfic is an Art, MHA works that make me happy this site exists, Fics that give me *ideas*, Secret Stash Of Treasure, Purple Archivist: Read and Read Again, Finished, My morning bnha tea, FinishedReading_Z, Green Bean Makes Me Cry, Completed stories I've read, Mintz, bnha fics☆🌳, Don't Forget These Fics, Honestly every fanfic of Izuku I have ever read., hmm I guess I'll just cry about it (BNHA), bnha fics that give me a ton of serotonin, BB42_Favorite_MHA_fics, Completed Masterpieces Across Fandoms, Finished Fics (bnha), Scratch's pile of fanfics that they recommend to every stranger like the gospel, Looose Goose My Hero Fics, My Favorite (Completed) Fics, Mori's Favorite BNHA Fics!, soul healing comes from fanfiction, The Reasons For My Insomnia, ☆🌳My Hero Stories Worth Your Time☆🌳, BakuDeku, Nix's Faves *chef's kiss*, isabella9792_readinglist, the holy grail of fanfiction, Favorites BNHA☆, REAL GOOD DEKU FICS!!!!, MHA fics that keep me from working like a functional adult🌳, great fics from all fandoms :), fics to sink your teeth into, if these were books i'd buy them (aka my

favorites on here), STPP making me sad, Best Stories, BEST MHA FICS TO EVER BE MADE 🧢, Dadzawa (can he be my new dad? I don't even have one), Izuku fics bc he's a lovely green soft boi (who can also kill god), Dadzawa - An Aizawa Shouta Zine, The Best Fics I Have Had The Pleasure of Reading, Dadzawa_favs, Magnolia's Favourite Fics, A Picky Vest's Favorites, Мои_любимые_работы🧢, Ace's Favorite FIcs, bnha loved fics, Wolfis MyHeroAcademia Library, my hero academia: a medley, Best, NOW THESE ARE SOME GOOD BNHA FICS, Days' best bnha finds 🌤, ✧Insomnia Reads✧, craftyreader_favs, mha fanfic that waters my crops, hey_look_at_all_these_hidden_gems, Good soup, Haunting My Heart and Healing My Soul, happy fics that make alyster go brrrr, Great Fics i Want To Re Read, Long_fics, BNHA, finished works I'm in love with, Flashfreeze Recs, Leannic Recs, □the bnha icebin□, MHA FICS, ✧Chris's Best Izuku Fics✧, Dadzawa for the Soul, .⋆˚.•*.↩My Bebu multiverse♡♡↬.*•.˚⋆., Bnha, bnha fics that kept me company at night, Well written BNHA comfort fics, These extra kudos for this fic-, Greta's_favourite_mha, fuckin a, Izuku Midoriya and Authors on Their Quest to Take My Soul (ft. dadzawa), Adri's Hall of fame, From the Vault, STO My Hero Academia - completed works, lil bubs the cat (oreo) likes these fics (and so do I) (10/10) (would recommend), Dadzawa Vibes, 👌□ good shit, Rhynes MHA favs, Favorite MHA Stores, Favorite BNHA Fics ❤□, My Hero Academia Stories, i feel as though i have seen god, Sad fic or not (often they are), my heart is here, Fics for D-Nasty, 🎏Aman_ita's read works🎏, Bnha fanfic's that give me life, Boku no Hero Academia Fanfics, Worth Reading Again, seer's dadzawa and izuku fics ☆, Sansthepacifist's favorite fics, MHA dadzawa or dadmic and their zero-regrets family □, Izuku is just trying his best your honor, Fics to read again and again📚🌟, 🍈Melon's heart is held hostage by these wonderful fics🍈, Best of MHA, Dadzawa, FicsforKrusti, my personal stash of good bnha shit, Angsty Deku, Dadzawa is cool, Angst and fluff, 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs, Everything so far, thingsilike, AnoditeOmniaAbuzz, Eatbook's Cherished and wanting more All Fandoms, The Midoriya Izuku Archive, fics that cured my depression, Blob, 11/10 fanfics, Aj's good vibes, Ajs rereads, Izukuuu, AbsoluteGeniusFics, I need a good parental figure [read: Dadzawa] in my life, God-Tier Short Fics and Oneshots, Good Books To Read A Concerning Number of Times, Green Bean & Co, 🍿, BNHA keepers, Aizawa is Dadzawa

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by cassiopeia721

Summary

How is Eri able to forgive him, to look at him like he's a hero, when he failed her so badly for so long? If he had been stronger, faster, better with his quirk, he would have been able to get her out of their faster, save her right when she first ran into him instead of so much later. Sir Nighteye was right about him not deserving—

Problem Child? comes Aizawa-sensei's voice. He sounds tired and a bit irritated, as always, but beneath that there's a layer of sheer incredulity.

Problem Child? his voice comes again. This time Izuku finally recognizes where it's coming from— his own head. He can feel a sharp, painful jolt of panic physically stabbing through his chest, and he can't help but bite back an emphatic *shit*.

Or: While visiting Eri at the hospital following her rescue from the Shie Hassaikai, Izuku and Aizawa-sensei both run into a nurse with a telepathy based quirk, and Izuku finds himself in a telepathic bond with his teacher. This is... somewhat worrying, considering how many secrets Izuku needs to keep.

Notes

Happy Holidays/Merry Christmas/enjoy this random ordinary day of the year, Aries! Ily <3

Edit: I can't believe I forgot! Huge thanks to Kes for helping me plot this whole thing out, and to Art for helping me come up with this title! <3

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

> CW for chapters is in the end notes to minimize spoilers. Use the "see the end of the chapter for notes" link to see them, then refresh the page. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku normally goes out of his way to be polite, but right now he's so impatient to see Eri that his manners slip a little bit. Instead of waiting for the nurse to move, he wiggles past her, ignoring the way his bare elbow brushes the back of her hand. He doesn't even notice the tingling wave that spreads outwards from that point of contact. His mind is on one thing and one thing only, and that's Eri—so young little sister *have to protect* Eri.

When Izuku enters the hospital wing, she lifts her head and a bright smile bursts across her face, filling Izuku's chest with warmth. "Deku!" she cries. Izuku can't help the answering smile that blooms across his face. "Hello, Eri," he says. "How are you feeling?"

Eri's face falls a bit. "My… my cu—my... it still isn't working right," she says, twisting the hospital gown that she's wearing in between her little hands. Moving slowly so as not to startle her, Izuku scoots onto the bed to join her. He opens his arms, and Eri crawls into then; he's found that she craves physical touch deeply, but will never make the first move to initiate it. It's one of many things that Izuku hopes to change.

"I deaged another nurse yesterday," she whispers, curling up against his chest in a way that's grown familiar to both of them, recently. "With my c—quirk." She looks up at him hopefully, Izuku smiles back to encourage her in having referred to her quirk correctly, and then, when she buries her head in his chest again, presses a kiss to her forehead.

"It's not your fault," he says into her hair. "You're so young, and you've done very well." He clasps her small hands in his own. "No one can expect you to have fully mastered your quirk like that, yet."

Izuku privately thinks that her fear of her quirk is most of the reason for her lack of control. She's never had any problems with accidentally

using her quirk on him since the rescue, which Izuku thinks is because she saw that it didn't hurt him then, and so she isn't petrified of it harming him like she is with everyone else. As a result, Eri's not constantly pushing it down and suppressing it in his presence as she does with the others, which of course inevitably makes it spring back in a burst of uncontrolled power not too much later.

Either way, what he said earlier stands. No one can expect her to have fully mastered it yet. She's only a child, and a young (*so young*) one at that.

"Chisaki-sama did," Eri whispers. Izuku's heart aches heavy and hot in his chest, and he pulls her even closer, resting his chin gently atop her head. "I know. That was wrong of him, and I'm sorry," he says.

Eri seems satisfied, satisfied enough that he starts humming low in his throat in the way he knows she likes, the way that will always put her to sleep. Still, Izuku himself isn't satisfied at all. His stomach is clenching like how it does sometimes when he exercises too long and too hard, and he can taste guilt, bitter as bile, coating the back of his throat.

The sensation of his regret is so strong that he doesn't notice the renewed tingling from his elbow, or the way he suddenly feels a bit more tired, a bit more settled. Instead, his mind is occupied picking over his past choices, finding flaws to criticize. How could he have allowed Eri to go back to Chisaki, seeing those bandages on her arms and noticing the way she'd clung to his legs, desperate and so so scared? What kind of hero was he, that he hadn't been able to save Eri for so long? It's his fault that there are too-familiar raised white lines layered on the smooth, child-silky skin of her arms and legs.

How is Eri able to forgive him, to look at him like he's a hero, when he failed her so badly for so long? If he had been stronger, faster, better with his quirk, he would have been able to get her out of their faster, save her right when she first ran into him instead of so much later. Sir Nighteye was right about him not deserving—

Problem Child? comes Aizawa-sensei's voice. He sounds tired and a bit irritated, as always, but beneath that there's a layer of sheer incredulity.

Izuku looks up, looking around the room for Aizawa, but he isn't there. His brow furrows. It had sounded like Aizawa-sensei was right there—right in front of him. Maybe he's just outside the door? But he

hadn't sounded muffled…

Problem Child? his voice comes again. This time Izuku finally recognizes where it's coming from—his own head. He can feel a sharp, painful jolt of panic physically stabbing through his chest, and he can't help but bite back an emphatic *shit*.

Language, Aizawa-sensei replies dryly, and it's that, that confirmation that Aizawa-sensei can hear his thoughts too, that it's not just one way, that has Izuku spiraling.

Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck, Izuku chants mentally. Dimly he's aware of Aizawa-sensei thinking, with a note of amusement, *I had never realized the kid was so foul-mouthed*.

Fuckfuckfuckfuck this can't be real. This is just some sort of stress-induced hallucination or something because there's no fucking way, there just isn't! Izuku bites into his hand, hard, to try to ground himself.

Problem Child, get your teeth out of your hand. Underneath the sternness of the words is an underlying worry, bordering on desperation, maybe even panic. It loosens something long untouched in Izuku's chest, with a feeling like a very old wound being touched. Izuku doesn't like this strange new feeling, so he steadfastly ignores it.

It's probably not a hallucination then, he reasons instead. How the *fuck* is he supposed to deal with this? Wasn't his life hard enough without literally having a goddamn teacher in his head?

Look, Aizawa-sensei tells him gruffly, *I know that this is hardly optimal for either of us.* He starts saying something about respecting each other's privacy, but Izuku isn't listening, mind too busy racing.

There has to be some sort of solution to this, some sort of way to prevent it from being *quite* this bad. This can't really be his life, right? He just has to get his head on straight and think properly and… fuck, it's probably a quirk, in which case there probably *isn't* an easy solution. *Fuck.*

Izuku lets out a shaky sigh. There's no way that this won't end in a huge trash fire of a clusterfuck, he just *knows* it. This is *so* par for the course for his life, he shouldn't even be surprised.

Izuku has to admit that it could be worse, though. Of all the teachers, Aizawa-sensei is the one who he trusts the most. Considering he'd risked his life for his students at the USJ, and the way he'd defended

them multiple times, it's highly unlikely that he'd be the UA traitor. Besides, hadn't Izuku noted multiple times that he was the kindest teacher he'd ever had? Although… he's also the most intelligent teacher Izuku has ever had… fuck.

Well, Aizawa-sensei drawls, *thanks for that glowing endorsement.* He sounds sarcastic, but it would be difficult not to notice the genuine warmth that's blooming in his chest or the exasperated sort of fondness underlying his sarcastic tone. Izuku blushes hotly. Right. Aizawa-sensei can also hear his every thought. Dumbass.

Izuku lifts his head and starts counting to the ceiling tiles. He's just reached his fourteenth tile when Aizawa-sensei thinks, *we should probably contact a nurse. They'll have records of the quirks of everyone in the hospital, which will allow us to learn more about the situation.*

Yeah, Izuku thinks in response. Hopefully, it'll be something that doesn't last long—for instance, a mere five minutes—or something with an easy deactivation clause.

It would be best to be in the same place when we ask, Aizawa-sensei thinks. *Where are you?*

Izuku looks down at Eri, who snuffles into his chest like she can feel his gaze on her even in her sleep. *In Eri's room.*

As Izuku waits, he can feel the tiredness and self-possession that he now recognizes as being characteristic of Aizawa-sensei lessening. Maybe, he thinks hopefully, the quirk is wearing off already.

There's a quiet knock at the door, and then Aizawa-sensei enters, followed by a nurse that he recognizes from earlier, who immediately bows deeply. "I sincerely apologize for the accidental activation of my quirk," she says. "If there is anything I can do to make this easier for you…"

"A short explanation of your quirk would be helpful," Aizawa-sensei says. It's a bit odd, hearing him speak instead of just hearing his thoughts. He displays less emotion in his speech, Izuku notices.

"My quirk created a telepathic connection between the people who touch when it's activated," the nurse explains. "In this case, the two of you. This bond allows for the passage of thoughts and emotions, and is strengthened by greater distance between the bonded people."

"*Strengthened* by distance?" Aizawa-sensei clarifies, brows furrowed.

It's distant, but Izuku thinks he can hear him musing, *I would have thought it would be the opposite.*

The nurse nods. "The closer you are, the less of the other's thoughts and emotions you will hear. The further away from each other that you are, the 'louder' or more distinct they become."

Izuku glances at Aizawa-sensei, who is now only a few feet away. That explains how the bond seemed to have been lessening as he approached the room Izuku was in.

"And how long does this bond last?" Aizawa-sensei asks.

The nurse bites her lip, then hesitantly admits, "On average… about a week, I would say?"

Frustration crests in Izuku, and he narrowly resists the urge to bury his teeth in his knuckles yet again. *Fuck.*

Aizawa-sensei glances at Izuku, who steadfastly refuses to meet his eyes. "...we should probably head back," he says at last. Izuku nods. He knows that with the two of them so close together, Aizawa-sensei won't be able to hear much, but on the ride back, he still stares out the window, memorizing license plates and burying all his real thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

CW: implied/referenced child abuse, self harm like imagery/ graphic description of scars, self harm, descriptions of panic

If you enjoyed this, feel free to drop me a comment or a kudos! I don't always respond because I am awkward af but I treasure all of the comments I get <3

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Izuku wakes up the following morning, he immediately knows that he's forgetting something. It's only when he hears Aizawa-sensei mentally grumbling, *why are you meowing at me? I just fed you.* that he remembers.

Fuck, Izuku thinks eloquently. He'd somehow managed to get through the rest of the previous day, but he's constantly been on edge—it had been exhausting having to censor his own thoughts, and he doesn't know if he's going to be able to pull it off again.

Good morning, kid, Aizawa-sensei thinks at him.

Good morning, Aizawa-sensei, Izuku replies cautiously and starts brushing his teeth, mentally reciting every single fact he can remember about the origin of the practice of brushing teeth as he does so.

Once he's done with that, he heads down for breakfast. Iida slides into his seat on the right, and Ochako and Asui sit across from him. Meanwhile, Todoroki sits down on his other side. He seems subdued; he has ever since last weekend when he'd visited his—

Izuku cuts that thought off before it can go any farther, turning his head to look for something else to fixate on. Iida looks a bit tired, he notes; he hopes that his friend isn't suppressing his emotions like he'd done right before the Ho—

Fuck. Izuku directs his gaze down at his eggs and starts trying to remember every fact he knows about eggs.

Look, comes Aizawa-sensei's exasperated mental voice, *I don't care about any of your teenage drama. Whatever I might accidentally find out about your friends' crushes or feuds will be kept in confidence; as soon as this quirk has worn off, we'll never speak of any of this again. You don't need to pointlessly expend all of this effort.*

Yes Sensei, Izuku thinks back obediently and returns to reciting facts on the properties of ostrich eggs.

Once he heads into class, things should get a bit easier. He doesn't have to worry about Aizawa-sensei hearing his thoughts during homeroom nearly as much since they're so physically close, and in the other classes, all he has to do is make sure he stays constantly focused on the classwork, which is easy enough in theory.

Unfortunately, theory and practice are two very different things. He'd never realized how much he allowed his mind to wander during class until he refused to allow it to stray even the slightest. It's so tiring to never allow himself to space out even a little bit, not even during the walks between classes or during times when he's already finished his work.

Whereas before he'd enjoyed class, now his refusal to thinking about anything besides school is quickly leaving him sick and tired of his material and bored of school. Which each passing period, the impulse to let his mind wander grows harder to resist.

It's not surprising then that eventually, he slips. It's a bit of surprise when and how, though, considering he'd actually been succeeding in paying attention to class.

"Midoriya, if you could please answer number three?"

Izuku can't help the way he flushes uncomfortably under Ectoplasm's gaze—having a teacher's attention on him has always meant something *bad*—but he forces himself to sit up straight and speak clearly all the same. "74.92 degrees, Sensei."

"Almost." The corners of Ectoplasm's eyes crinkle as he smiles, but Izuku knows it's just pity. "It looks like you used sin when you should have used tan. If you look at the triangle for number three, side b is actually an adjacent angle, not a hypotenuse."

Fuck. A wave of self-directed scorn sweeps through him, curdling in his mouth and tightening his throat until it feels small and choked. That's so fucking obvious. How could he have been stupid enough to miss something so simple? Honestly, Izuku is continually amazed that such a colossal fucking idiot like him somehow managed to end up in UA considering he can't even *tell an adjacent angle from a hypoten—*

...what? There's a sharp note underlying that familiar voice, almost like it's some sort of warning.

Shit, Aizawa-sensei. Feeling very much like a mouse who's just felt the shadow of a hawk fall over him, Izuku scrambles to flip the page to

the next set of problems and immediately sets to work.

Kid, Aizawa-sensei says, more gently this time. Izuku quickly notes down which angles in the next right triangle are the opposite, adjacent, and hypotenuse and then starts writing down the relevant formula, filling the values in as he goes.

Kid, Aizawa-sensei tries again. Izuku pulls out his calculator and inputs his formula, then writes down the answer.

Kid. Seriously. Izuku boxes his answer, the thin lead of his mechanical pencil almost breaking from the pressure he's putting on it. Wow, Izuku thinks brightly, math is so interesting! It's a good thing there isn't anything to distract him from class, considering how important it is that he learn this!

There's a sensation like a sigh. *...The kid has a point. I'll just bring it up later,* Izuku hears Aizawa-sensei reason, and then his attention seems to turn away. Just in case, Izuku keeps his mind firmly on his schoolwork for the rest of the day.

When school finally, *finally* ends, Izuku brushes off his friends when they ask him if he'd like to go hang out like they usually do. He'd love to spend some time with them, to unwind and think about something other than school, but if he does, he's bound to end up thinking about some of their secrets, and he wouldn't be able to bear it if he betrayed what they had told him in confidence.

So instead, Izuku stays back at the dorms and begins his homework, taking extra care with the math problems so he doesn't make any more stupid mistakes. Once that is done, he fills the rest of his time training (without his quirk, so as to avoid thinking about it) and working ahead for his classes.

By that night, he's sore all over—sorer than usual because, with extra time to fill, he'd pushed himself longer and harder than usual—and his brain feels like mush. And that's not even touching on the aching loneliness that comes from the way he's been ignoring his friends for the last day and a half. The only good thing is that overexerting himself during training makes it easy to not think as he showers, and when he collapses into his bed, he falls asleep easily.

The water is thick as molasses around him. Izuku needs to keep on moving, needs to go help because who knows what's even happening to the others while they waste their time here, but it takes so much effort to wade through the sticky, heavy water pressing around him.

Izuku rolls, throwing the heavy blanket water off. Finally, he's free; or at least, he is for a moment. When he sees that Shigaraki is standing not too far away, he and the other two have to quickly duck behind the nearest bit of cover. Izuku doesn't want to—he's dimly aware that bad things will happen, bad things he could stop if he acted instead of hiding—but he has to because that's how this works, how it always has and always will.

While Izuku and the others cower, frozen and made useless by their shameful fear, Shigaraki grasps Aizawa-sensei's elbow, which flakes and peels like dried paint made brittle and cracked by the scorching of long, hot sun. Behind the flaking-away skin, there is red flesh and a hint of white bone. Izuku tries to move—he knows red like that is not something that should be outside the body, it should only be inside the body, it's wrong wrong wrong—but it feels like molasses is caught around him still, even though there's no more water to wade through.

"Nomu," Shigaraki orders. "Kill Eraserhead." And there's the Nomu, bald with skin stretched thin to try but fail to cover its naked brain, mismatched and patchwork in a way that makes Izuku's stomach churn. With the sight of the Nomu, Izuku knows that it is too late; even if he escaped the molasses' hold, he wouldn't be able to do any good now.

Nomu slams Aizawa-sensei back and forth like a ragdoll. There's a terrible, echoing crack as his head slams into the concrete, and blood puddles out around him, sticky and viscous and that same wrong-wrong-*wrong* red color as his elbow. Izuku knows that he is dead, even before Shigaraki yanks him up by his long dark hair to peer mockingly into his ruined face. His forehead where it impacted the ground is flaked and cracked in the same way that his elbow was, brittle paint peeling in the scorching, relentless heat of the sun.

Shigaraki turns suddenly in an almost lunging motion that reminds Izuku of some large, predatory cat. Behind the amputated hand he wears upon his face, he is smiling too widely. "There you are!" he crows, and Izuku feels a stab of panic as Shigaraki reaches out, his hand about to close around Asui's head—

Panting harshly, Izuku shoots up out of his bed. His heart is racing, and he can still feel the afterglow of that jolt of panic he'd felt thrumming through the center of his chest. Asui— Aizawa-sensei—

—*are both fine* cuts in Aizawa-sensei's voice. A wave of sheer *relief* sweeps through Izuku, so strong that he can't help but slump

bonelessly against his mattress. It's then that the shame hits, hot and burning, because Aizawa-sensei just saw his nightmare—saw his *weakness—*

It's not a weakness, Aizawa-sensei tells him. He sounds tired, and Izuku's stomach clenches with guilt; a glance at the clock shows him that it's three in the morning. He must have woken Aizawa-sensei up. *Every pro hero ends up with nightmares eventually. It's no surprise that facing villains during your first week of school left you with some nightmares. If anything, it's a sign of the* school's *weakness that you were forced to suffer through something like that in the first place.* The last bit is softer and almost bitter; Izuku thinks he wasn't meant to hear it.

As for waking me up, I was already awake, so it's illogical to feel guilty. Izuku doesn't hear any words beyond that, but he gets the impression of papers to grade, and security cameras to watch, and dry eyes that feel heavy with tiredness.

...right. Goodnight, Sensei. It's only the fact that he's thinking and not speaking that keeps him from stuttering. Fucking hell, he's even more of a mess than usual. Izuku drags his hand over his face, trying to compose himself.

There's a moment's hesitation, hesitation that Izuku can physically feel, and then Aizawa-sensei says, *Good night, Problem Child,* and then he seems to turn back to his papers.

Izuku buries his face in his pillow, hoping it will be cool enough to soothe the hot flush still burning there. But it's not pleasantly cool at all, and have his nose buried directly in the center of the pillow only makes it hard to breathe, so he turns his head to the side. But that makes his neck ache, the muscles of his shoulder still sore from weightlifting that afternoon. He tries turning his neck the other direction but that's just worse; he flips onto his back, and the bedsheets tangle around him, sticky with sweat and off-centered on his body from when he'd kicked them off while dreaming. He stares at the ceiling and tries to count sheep because there are no tiles to count, but it's contrived and he *knows* it's contrived so he ends up wondering if he feels any sleepier every few seconds.

Izuku feels the phantom sensation of his chest rising and falling in a sigh that is not his own. He half-flinches, but Aizawa-sensei doesn't start scolding him. Instead, he says, *Draw in a deep breath for one, two, three, four. And now out for one, two, three. Now in again for one, two, three, four.* Face burning with embarrassment, Izuku obeys. He can feel

his body relaxing around him, almost melting into the bed, which somehow so much more welcoming now. Aizawa's voice in his head makes for a soothing sort of background noise, and he finds the iron grip he's had on his thoughts slipping.

They aren't very coherent; there's something about how soft his pillowcase feels, some wordless animal part of him purring at how pleasantly warm his bed feels, another part noting that his ear is itchy but his hand is far too heavy to reach up and scratch it. There's another thought, vulnerable and emotion-soaked and too loose for words; something about how nice it is to have someone else take care of him once; it feels like letting out a breath he's been holding for a very long time. How he wishes this would happen more, how he would like a cool hand on his forehead and fingers tangled in his hair.

By this point Izuku is too far gone to even remember the telepathic bond, so he doesn't notice Aizawa-sensei thinking something about coping mechanisms and new homeroom lessons and *needing to protect his children students from the aftermath of hero fights as much as the fights themselves*. He certainly doesn't notice the moment when that last thought makes its way to Aizawa-sensei, doesn't notice the way Aizawa-sensei's chest clenches, stricken, doesn't notice the ripple of emotion across the smooth pond of Aizawa-sensei's mind. Izuku only buries his face deeper into his soft pillow and sinks into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

CW: self-harm, self-depreciation, implied/referenced child abuse, nightmares

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku can't look Aizawa-sensei in the eyes. In fact, he can't even look in his general direction without feeling his cheeks grow hot. He can't believe he'd done something so embarrassing as to—well, best not to think about it, both because reliving it again will only make him feel even worse, and also because of the telepathic bond.

Izuku finds other places to look instead. Like, for instance, his plate as he scoots his cold eggs in circles, round and round. He's trying to think of more egg facts to recite, but it's hard when he went through all of the ones that he knows yesterday. It's made worse by the way that his friends are trying so hard to draw him into conversation and by the way that Izuku is so tempted to join them. The only reason that he doesn't is that every time he focuses on them too much, he can sense mentions of the secrets told to him by one friend or another threatening to bubble to the surface of his thoughts.

Izuku senses Aizawa-sensei leaving the room, his eyes lingering on Izuku's back. He's glad Aizawa's not there to watch him in person, anymore, but at the same time Izuku's breath speeds up a little bit because now Aizawa-sensei will be able to hear his thoughts even more clearly, and there are so many things that Izuku really, really doesn't want Aizawa-sensei to learn—

Izuku puts his fork down and starts picking at his cuticles. His hand is aching, deep in the bones that he's broken, which means it's probably going to rain soon. That's not something he wants to think too deeply about either, so he turns his mind to school, even though by now he's so sick of thinking about nothing but school that he feels like he could scream.

Today, he's going to have English with Yamada-Sensei, and then History with Snipe, and then Foundational Heroics with All Might. He feels a wave of affection at the thought of All Might—how can he not, when the man has done so much for him? He's—Izuku yanks his thoughts away, directing his gaze towards the ceiling tiles again.

He tries to count them, but he's tired enough that his count keeps slipping, and that reminds him of losing track of counting sheep the

night before, and then how Aizawa-sensei had—he bites into the edge of his thumb in a way that makes it look like he's just biting his nails, but still allows him to sink his teeth into his flesh hard enough that he'll have indents there later.

Kid, comes Aizawa-sensei's voice in his head, and Izuku suppresses a flinch, because he sounds upset. Evidently, Aizawa-sensei can still feel the stifled flinch through the bond, because when he speaks again, his voice is softer, gentler. *Kid. You're fine. I'm not going to judge you for any of this.*

Tangled thoughts rise up in him, too powerful to be stopped. *You might not judge me now but the things you don't know would still demand judgment—you might not judge me now but that's because I've still managed to keep you from knowing enough to really judge me—why the fuck* wouldn't*you judge me?*

Once again, Izuku can feel more than hear Aizawa-sensei's sigh. Distantly he can hear, aching with frustration, *Seriously, Nedzu? Now? The kid needs me,* and then, directed at him this time, *I can't talk more now, but I highly doubt that anything*—suppressed, and hardly loud enough to hear, *a sunshine child like you*, then louder, *—you could do would make me suddenly make me judge you anywhere close to as harshly as you're imagining.* There's a beat and then, *...unless you're the UA traitor.* Izuku can feel the twist of pain that thought brings Aizawa-sensei.

No, no! Izuku hastens to reassure him. *I—I would* never *do that, that's not it at all!*

Izuku's words must ring true because Aizawa-sensei lets out a huff of relief and thinks, *Good.* Izuku can feel the fullness and gladness of that *good*; the small bubble of contentment that Aizawa-sensei feels, knowing that Izuku isn't the traitor. *Now, I need to go, so eat your breakfast and* stop hurting yourself like that *or so help me I will give you detention,* Aizawa-sensei orders.

Izuku looks down at his plate. How is he supposed to ground himself without doing that? It's what he's always done.

Try focusing on your five senses, Aizawa-sensei suggests, voice more gentle now, and then Izuku can feel his mind turning away, towards Nedzu and staff meetings and paperwork. Izuku breathes out a slow sigh of relief.

As he eats, he does as Aizawa-sensei said, and tries to focus on his five

senses. It helps, a little, and it's a good way to keep his mind from lingering on any of the many, many things he doesn't want to think about.

English with Yamada-Sensei is—hard. Izuku keeps on wanting to think about All Might, about All Might teaching him this word or that, and it's tiring to continually drag his thoughts back on course. It doesn't help that his friends seem to be worried about him—they keep on shooting him *looks* in class, and then whispering amongst themselves while glancing at him. After what feels like an eternity, class ends, and Izuku hurries out, avoiding both his friends and Aizawa-sensei, who he can feel reaching his mind out towards the bond.

History is next, which lightens Izuku's mood. He's always liked History, and it's hard to imagine anything in the Quirk Wars or the origin of the hero system that could lead to him brushing up against thoughts of his secrets. Maybe for this class, at least, he can let his guard down a bit. He releases a slow breath and loosens the iron grip around his thoughts just slightly.

"Today, we'll be focusing on something occurring now and not just the past." Snipe-sensei. "As we've just finished covering discrimination against Quirked individuals during the Dawn of Quirks, now is a good time to address present-day discrimination against Quirkless individuals."

Izuku's heart skips a beat, and suddenly it feels like there is a hand, heavy and unrelenting, constricting around his lungs. He wants to bite his knuckles again, but he doesn't want detention with Aizawa-sensei, so he digs his nails into the skin of his forearm, instead.

I don't like that either, Aizawa-sensei says, sounding tired and frustrated. Izuku is tired and frustrated, too. It's like Aizawa-sensei doesn't want him to do *anything*. He has to censor all of his thoughts because of the bond, and now he has to change all of his usual behaviors, too.

Not all of your usual behaviors, Aizawa-sensei says. *I just refuse to stand idly by while you self-harm.*

Izuku's brow furrows. It's not like it's self-harm. He's just biting his knuckles and digging into his flesh with his nails. It doesn't even break his skin. It's not like it's *real* self-harm.

And what would real *self-harm be?* Aizawa-sensei asks, softly enough that Izuku doesn't even realize it's not his own thought, that he

doesn't think twice about letting his thoughts follow that path.

Izuku thinks of raised white scars, of crimson blood in the wake of the razor blade, of the sting of skin breaking. And then he realizes what he just thought and yanks his mind back to class, ignoring the way he can feel Aizawa-sensei's stomach twist, can hear him thinking lowly, voice fraught with pain, *Kid…*

Izuku doesn't want to go down this path any longer, doesn't want to poke those old wounds any more than he already has, so he forces his attention back to Snipe-sensei.

"…although many of you may have heard that twenty percent of the world's population is quirkless, this statistic is ultimately rather unhelpful in looking at quirklessness in terms of Japanese society."

Izuku bites the inside of his lip, just a bit, like maybe Aizawa-sensei won't get mad at him that way. He already knows this statistic, has known it for a long time.

I'm not angry at *you,* Aizawa-sensei says. *I just…* his thoughts twist into something more made up of amorphous emotions than the solidity of words, something warm and soft yet also almost painful in the intensity of its tenderness. *I just don't want you to get hurt.*

Izuku swallows, hard. Fuck, he thinks unhappily, he's pretty sure that that's *worse*.

Snipe-sensei's voice breaks through their thoughts. "Firstly, the model used to get that statistic doesn't include those without the second toe joint, who are not medically diagnosed to be quirkless but have quirks which are either too subtle or have too specific activation requirements to have a quirk in practical terms."

Back when he and Kacchan still played together, they'd used to think of random things for Izuku to try. He'd hop on one foot, or recite strings of nonsense syllables, or walk around on his hands instead of his feet, hoping that one of them would trigger a previously hidden quirk.

Izuku can feel Aizawa-sensei's mind catching on that thought, trying to fit it in with his framework of Izuku. Izuku likes the old, inaccurate framework, so he bows his head, staring at his desk and trying to focus just on what Snipe-sensei is saying and not any of the myriads of ways it relates to his own life.

A minute ago he wanted Aizawa-sensei to be fixating on anything *other* that self-harm, but right now, he would break another arm if it meant Aizawa-sensei would just go back to scolding him about that.

“Additionally, the quirkless population varies widely across country and generation. In Sweden, for example, only thirty percent of the population has quirks. As we are one of the countries most rapidly affected by the Dawn of Quirks, the Japanese population is made up of ninety percent quirk users. Of the ten percent without quirks, the vast majority of those are in the older generations; only five percent of your parents’ generation was medically quirkless, and only .25% of your generation is medically quirkless.”

There are maybe seven or eight hundred students at each middle school. 750 divided by 100, multiplied by .25—Izuku subtly pulls his calculator out of his pencil pouch and puts in the numbers. About 1.8 quirkless students per school. He wonders if things would have been better if there had been two quirkless students at his school, if he would have had at least one friend that way.

Is the kid seriously implying—he clearly has a quirk— Izuku can hear Aizawa-sensei thinking.

Now, Izuku thinks before he can stop himself. *Now.* He has a quirk *now*.

Aizawa-sensei's thoughts still, frozen by his surprise. Izuku doesn't realize he's stopped breathing until he can feel Aizawa-sensei forcing himself to take a breath again.

Izuku bites his lip again, harder, and moves his eyes up from his calculator to the board, where Snipe-sensei is showing them some statistics—statistics that Izuku knows like the scars on the back of his hands. Statistics on child abandonment, on high school graduation, on employment. On suicide.

Izuku bows his head, stomach churning. It's okay, he reminds himself. That’s not him anymore. He has a quirk now. His teeth are indenting so hard into the flesh of his lip that he thinks he can taste blood now, hot and metallic on his tongue. It’s fine, so he doesn’t need to think about it, shouldn’t think about it now because Aizawa-sensei *can’t know*, can’t know about *any* of this.

Why not? Aizawa-sensei asks, again in that gentle voice. This time there’s a thread of... something under his composure, something that is as thin and sharp as a wire.

Because, Izuku starts to answer instinctively, but then he remembers himself and swallows back his words.

Snipe-sensei talks them through a couple of the statistics, explaining what they mean like Izuku doesn't know each of them intimately. Like he hasn't read the research papers each one is pulled from, like he hasn't seen the evidence of the social phenomenons they document firsthand.

He's so composed as he does, Izuku notes. He hates that, just a little, hates it because Snipe-sensei is so composed but he feels jittery and on edge, feels like he's about to step onto a battlefield.

“What do you think could be the cause of these statistics?” Snipe-sensei asks once he's finished explaining all of them.

Izuku doesn’t dare look up from where his gaze is glued to his desk. It's a nice desk, smooth and sturdy. His desk at Aldera never looked anything like that. Izuku has to tug his mind back to where it should be by biting the inside of his lip, so that he doesn't think anything more about how his desk at Aldera looked, most days.

How did *it look?* Aizawa-sensei asks. Izuku ignores him.

“What do you think could be the cause of these statistics?” Snipe-sensei asks again, just a little bit more gently this time.

At Aldera, they would have said that the high child abandonment rates were because no one would want a useless child. From there, they would have added that the low high school graduation rates were because quirkless people were stupid and under evolved, and that the low employment rates were because who would hire someone without a quirk when there were a thousand better candidates?

Problem Child... Izuku gets a sense of heartburn from Aizawa-sensei, like maybe he’s eaten something too acidic. His stomach is clenching, too, as though he’s worried.

Just like the last time Snipe-sensei asked this question, the room is silent, all of the students avoiding making eye contact with Snipe. None of them want to say it. Izuku supposes it’s too politically correct, here at UA, to give voice to those opinions anymore. But that doesn’t mean they don’t believe it.

Do you really think that? Aizawa-sensei sounds pained.

Everyone thinks those kind of things. The people at UA are kind, yes, but back at Aldera, there were people who were kind, too. Kind to everyone— even the kids who were too nerdy, too shy, too awkward. Everyone except for him.

A hand shoots up. Kacchan's hand. Izuku's chest crumples, and he feels like he can't breathe, for a moment. Kacchan will say it, then, say it when no one else dares to. It makes sense; he's always been brave. Izuku forces his chest to expand again, forces himself to draw air once more. Better to hear the truth aloud than just know they're all thinking it, he tells himself.

"Bakugo-kun."

"The high suicide rates are partially a result of—suicide-baiting." Kacchan's voice when he speaks the last two words is like a stranger's. Uncharacteristically hollow and quiet without its usual anger.

Izuku feels a wave of heat washing over him like a sudden, rapid onset fever. His face is hot, his chest burning like there's an ember where his heart used to be. Something hot and rapid—either his quirk or molten fire, Izuku can't tell—is rushing through the veins of his arms instead of blood.

He says that so blandly, Izuku thinks, not breathing quite right. He says it so passively, like it's something that just *happened* and not something he fucking *did*.

Something he did? Aizawa-sensei's mental voice sounds terse and urgent, like when he'd ordered them to stay back at the USJ attack. ***What?*** He can feel Aizawa-sensei draw in a somewhat ragged breath, then ask again, *What do you mean by that, exactly?*

Izuku should back down at that, should go back to thinking smooth unworrying thoughts, but he's staring at Kacchan, at that blemishless, unscarred face so mild and bland, and it feels like all of the anger Kacchan usually carries has become his own instead. Izuku runs his tongue over his teeth, pressing it hard against them to ground himself with the painful scrape, but also perhaps taking pleasure in their pointedness, like he's going to bite Kacchan again like he did once as a three-year-old.

You've known him a long time, haven't you, he hears Aizawa-sensei realize, distantly, but the heat instead of him is still making it hard to listen. It's as though Izuku is a volcano, and the words he wants to say is the magma creeping up his throat and scorching his mouth.

Look at me, Kacchan, Izuku finds himself thinking. *Look me in the eyes and say that again. Don't just pretend it didn't happen, like it's all fine because I have a quirk now. Like the fact that we're finally equals means that you didn't spend the last ten years punching down.*

Punching dow—I hope that was just a metaphor, is all Aizawa-sensei can manage. Izuku can feel the vague hysteria rising in Aizawa-sensei, the sense of powerlessness, like everything is spiraling out of his control, the world tipping and spinning around him.

It probably doesn't help that what answers that hesitant, overwhelmed thought of Aizawa-sensei's is memories of blood in Izuku's mouth like sucking on copper pennies, of slipping All Might bandaids from his mom's first aid kit, of scar tissue pink and shiny stretched out over his bones.

Scar tissue. Scar tissue. Aizawa-sensei's voice is taut and aching, like pressing on a bruise. Some part of Izuku recognizes he should worry about that, but Kacchan is finally making eye contact with him, and Izuku can't help but think at him, think at him like he's the one he has the telepathic bond with and not Aizawa-sensei.

Do you even regret what you did? Did you ever feel guilty, when you sat at my mother's table and ate her food and called her Auntie Inko? Why are you talking about suicide baiting like it's something so regrettable *when you told me to take a swan dive off the roof and hope for a quirk in my next life?*

Aizawa-sensei hisses in an inhaled breath, so sharp that it punctures the bubble that Izuku's been floating in. Their chest is aching, aching like they've been impaled.

Izuku comes back to himself and realizes what he's done, what he's revealed. *Fuck*, he thinks, furious and ashamed. *Fuck.* He directs his gaze quickly back to his desk because if he keeps looking at Kacchan he's going to keep having thoughts of the kind that he doesn't want Aizawa-sensei to hear, and he's fucked things up more than enough for today, hasn't he?

Anger is rising again, but this time it isn't in Izuku. He can feel it distantly, filling Aizawa-sensei's lungs like he's going to breathe out flame instead of discarded air. Unlike Izuku's hot, wet anger, Aizawa-Sensei's anger is dry, and it burns so fiercely that it feels cold, cold as ice biting against skin, cold and precise and sharp as a razor blade.

When Aizawa-sensei speaks, it is in a voice tight with restrained

anger. *I'm sorry, kid, but you know I really can't just let that one lie.*

Izuku really, *really* wishes that he would. He pulls his knees up into his chair, curling protectively around his twisting, churning stomach in the same way that he did to protect his organs when Kacchan and the others would kick him when he was down. He feels like he's going to be sick.

Let me just go through what I think you've been saying, and see if I'm right, Aizawa-sensei says. It feels like he's trying to calm himself down, trying to be rational about this, but Izuku can still sense the rage in him, hanging in the air like a storm on the horizon. *You didn't have a quirk before, or at least you didn't have one that was immediately visible.*

For a moment, Izuku is silent, frozen in fear like some tiny, pathetic prey animal. Aizawa-sensei seems so angry, is all he can think. So angry. It never ends well when teachers are angry. Not for him.

Izuku can feel Aizawa-sensei making himself take a slow, deep breath. *I'm not angry at you,* he says, and his voice is as precise and gentle as silk laid over a blade. *I'm not angry at you at all. It's the people who hurt you who I'm angry at.*

Izuku blinks. He believes him. He believes him because he can feel it, can feel it in the bond that he and Aizawa-sensei share. Through that bond, he can feel Aizawa-sensei's careful restraint, his anger held back like how All Might would hold back his power to pat him on the back ever so gently.

Now, Aizawa-sensei says, and his voice is like a warm blanket draping around Izuku, even as he can feel the anger still stirring slowly in his chest. *You didn't have a quirk before.*

Izuku nods, and then realizes that Aizawa-sensei isn't able to see that, so he says *yes* inside his mind. Between that and how quickly Aizawa-sensei moves onto what else he has to say, Izuku doesn't have time to think anything suspicious about his quirk.

And because of this, Bakugo abused you, and the teachers at your school looked the other way. The words themselves are simple, but there's Aizawa's anger roiling underneath them, the fiery heat in Aizawa's chest twisting like a hungry beast eager to be unleashed. It's such a strong sensation that it takes a moment for Aizawa-sensei's actual words to register with him.

And because of this, Bakugo abused you, and the teachers at your school

looked the other way.

Abuse? Izuku rears back at the word, feeling like he'll maybe laugh. Either that or cry. It wasn't anything so bad as *that*—it was a little bit of childhood bullying, nothing deserving such a weighty word as *abuse* —

He scarred you, Aizawa-sensei says, sounding very tired, now, like a soldier who keeps on finding that the war will not end so easily as they had hoped.

Without any direction from his mind, Izuku's hand rises to rub at the places where he is flawed, the patches of burned flesh on his chest where the skin is pitted and ruined. They ache when it rains sometimes, just like the places where his bones break.

He scarred you, Aizawa-sensei repeats. *He scarred you, and he told you to kill yourself.*

It sounds so—stark when it's put like that. Stark like the expanse of blood welling out of under a peeled-off scab is stark, stark like the wind on a rooftop with only one lonely inhabitant, stark like glossy-pink scar tissue standing out against pale skin.

Kacchan's quirk is hard to control, Izuku says. He is half-glad for the bond because if he had to speak aloud, he thinks he would choke on the tightness in his throat. *His sweat is—it's got a chemical composition that is similar to nitroglycerin, and—*

I know what his quirk is, Aizawa-sensei says. *That's not what this conversation is about.* Frustration colors his words, making them thick and impossible to shake off. *Did he accidentally suicide-bait you, too? Perhaps he tripped over his tongue and told you to kill yourself when he wanted to ask what the homework was?*

Izuku swallows. *It was just a joke,* he says, but even within his own mind, it feels as weak and flimsy as tissue paper. Something in his chest twists like the wrong key in a lock as he thinks of the flash in Kacchan's eyes as he'd said that. He thinks about that flash sometimes, tries to divine some sort of meaning. Regret, maybe? Or maybe—maybe just glee.

Even if Bakugo intended it as a joke—(*which I highly doubt,* a quieter part of Aizawa-sensei's mind adds)—*it was still deeply harmful. Look at how it's impacting you even now.* Those last words aren't spoken like someone pressing their advantage, proving their opponent wrong.

They're spoken like Aizawa-sensei would like nothing more than to be wrong.

When Izuku listens really hard, he can hear other things Aizawa-sensei is thinking too, things that are more rife with pain and sadness than anger. *—is this why the kid acts with so little self-preservation? Is this why he continually throws himself into danger—because he thinks his life has no value? How did I* miss *this?*

It's not your fault, Izuku thinks back, because it *isn't.* The thought that Aizawa-sensei, who's risked his life for his class multiple times, has been a kinder and more trustworthy teacher than all of the other teachers Izuku's had combined—the thought that he was lacking, that he should blame himself? It's just ridiculous, especially considering that it's not like Izuku had *told* him, had asked him to do anything.

Why not? Aizawa-sensei asks. *Why not tell someone? We've all been treating this issue as though the two of you are rivals—fuck, kid, if I'd known you had just gotten your quirk I would have trained you completely differently—*

Izuku shrugs jerkily. He just... didn't want to deal with people's reactions, he supposes.

Aizawa-sensei's thoughts stutter, then pause. *What kind of reactions* were *you hiding it out of fear of?* Quieter: *did you think I would dismiss this?*

Izuku picks at his nails. *Not... really?* he hedges. After seeing Aizawa-sensei restraining Kacchan with his capture weapon during the Quirk Apprehension Test and overhearing him telling Kacchan more than once to watch the kind of things he was calling other people, he'd half-hoped that maybe Aizawa-sensei would take his side if he ever found out. But... Izuku has hoped for lots of things. He used to hope Kacchan would change his mind about thinking Izuku was worthless, and that he'd get a quirk after all, and that his dad would come back.

And... it's what all of his other teachers did, wasn't it? It doesn't help that this is *Aizawa-sensei*. If Aizawa-sensei turned out to be like all of the other teachers... Izuku doesn't know *what* he would do.

So. Izuku supposes the reason is this: trust and hope are both huge liabilities, and all of Izuku's old teachers always used any hint of vulnerability he's ever shown them against him.

Those 'teachers' should all have their licenses removed, Aizawa-sensei

thinks. He sounds—furious, but furious isn't enough of a word for it, even. He sounds like Izuku would if someone spat on his collection of All Might merch and told him that All Might could go fuck himself. It isn't the petty irritation of someone insulted, but a far more serious type of anger; the anger of someone whose *ideals* were insulted. *That's the exact opposite of what a teacher is* supposed *to do.*

Supposed to or not, it's what they *did*, Izuku thinks back, words heavy as stones dropping into a pool of water.

Izuku remembers the third-year teacher baiting Kacchan and his friends into attacking him during class for daring to dream of going to UA. He remembers the first-year teacher giving him detention for cheating because an under evolved, quirkless *deku* like him surely couldn't have gotten such a good grade on his own. (*I should have known that wasn't a harmless nickname,* Aizawa-sensei scolds himself.) He remembers all of the faculty, never saying a word when Kacchan used his quirk on Izuku during school.

You can't really blame Kacchan, Izuku reflects with a cool-eyed sort of clarity. *No one ever told him that what he did was wrong; if anything, they encouraged him. He was just a kid. It's not like he knew better.*

So you at least agree that Aldera can *be blamed, then,* Aizawa-sensei thinks with relish. The fire burning in him flares, widening and brightening.

...yes, I guess so, Izuku admits, feeling Aizawa-sensei has won some sort of battle but not sure which battle, or how.

Good, Aizawa-sensei thinks, and it sounds like a promise. Izuku can feel him smiling, smiling like the flash of a knife's blade, and wonders if he will regret this later.

Chapter End Notes

CW: self harm (including graphic descriptions of details related to it), implied/referenced suicide and suicide baiting, child neglect (adults ignoring bullying), systemic discrimination, physical abuse by bullies, scars resulting from bullying

Interlude

Chapter Summary

We see what Aizawa thinks of all of this.

CW in end notes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouta's thought process immediately after the revelation that he and Midoriya are telepathically connected can be split into a handful of neat, clearly defined stages.

The first is a mixture of shock and incredulity—*why,* Shouta wonders with the quiet resignation of someone who had had this thought at least a dozen times, *is it always the Problem Child?*

For a brief period after that Shouta finds himself occupied with the fact that Class 1-A's resident sunshine child evidently swears a frankly *disconcerting* amount in the privacy of his own mind.

After that comes the conclusion that Shouta is going to finally lose what little remains of his reputation as a strict teacher.

Contrary to popular belief, Shouta isn't actually strict with his students as some sort of sadistic power trip. Or… not *solely* because of that.

Heroics isn't just an industry; it's the center of a constant, concentrated public relations campaign that drives society to glamourize every aspect of it. As such, the gritty, difficult realities of heroics are little known and little acknowledged. Allowing his young, inexperienced students to develop inflated confidence in their abilities and continuing to idolize pro heroism will only lead to them being chewed up and spit out by the industry as soon as they try to make it in the real world. Thus, being strict and brutally honest about whether or not students will be able to make it as pro heroes has long been the best way for Shouta to protect the children under his care.

However, the events of this year have required him to take on a slightly different role. Unlike his previous students, Class 1-A doesn't need the harsh realities of life as a pro hero impressed on them;

they're already all too aware of all of the gory, painful details of their new lifestyle. They don't need to be encouraged to push themselves to reach their full potential, they need to be restrained to prevent themselves from burning out (sometimes even literally, Aizawa thinks with a grimace). More often than not, they don't need a strict disciplinarian, but an attentive and empathetic guardian.

It's only logical to change his behavior so that Shouta can more efficiently help them. No matter what Nemuri has to say on the matter, it does not mean that he's going soft. Although even if he is, Shouta isn't sure there's anything actually wrong with it. The kids deserve some softness after everything that they've been through.

In any case, the last shreds of his shattered reputation are soon to leave him anyway, so it's not like it matters anymore.

Shouta, always concerned with the most streamlined and orderly course of action, moves through the five stages of grief quickly enough that even the Problem Child he is newly telepathically attached to seem to notice. That out of the way, Shouta quickly turns his attention to what he can do to make the situation as pleasant as he can.

Shouta's first move is to try to assure the kid that he has no intention of prying into any of his secrets. As fond as he is of the kid, Shouta doesn't particularly want to know who he's crushing on, or any of his other teenager secrets… although if someone ends up asking the Problem Child out, Shouta may want to do a quick background check, just in case. Not as a shovel talk or anything, but just because he wouldn't put it past Toga to try to trick Midoriya into going on a date with her under the guise of being someone else.

(There's a reason Shouta calls Midoriya "Problem Child", and it's because Midoriya is the biggest source of problems that he's had since he found Bastard patchy-furred, burnt, and spitting in a dumpster. It can be exhausting keeping track of all of the possible threats to him and the rest of Class 1-A, although Shouta would never trade it for the world.)

As Shouta starts to realize that Problem Child may have more serious issues than just teenage drama (because *of course* he does, this is his *Problem Child*,) Shouta tries to strike a delicate balance of helping the kid as much as he can while simultaneously respecting his privacy and not imposing on him. After all, Problem Child isn't an abandoned cat he can simply pick up and carry home, however much his pleading eyes when he's trying to persuade Shouta to let him do something

look like Bastard's expression when he wants more food.

As such, Shouta doesn't press Midoriya as far as he would like to about his self-harm, self-depreciation, and evident nightmares. Even when it makes his stomach twist with worry, Shouta hangs back, working to address the issues Midoriya is afflicted with as professionally and impersonally as possible. Midoriya is already suffering from the excessive emotional intimacy brought on by the bond; it's not as though he wants more.

At least, that's what Shouta thinks until the night of the second day. As Midoriya drifts off, finally having managed to calm down from his nightmare about the USJ (Shouta is going to *murder* Shigaraki for what he did to his class), he releases the iron control he's evidently been exercising over his thoughts and emotions.

To Shouta, it feels like a dam has broken. He's nearly swept away the wave of powerful and vivid thoughts and feelings that crests over him. Some of the sensations he experiences, like the sleepy contentment that seeps into his bones, make Shouta smile. But the most prevailing sensation is not anything as pleasant as that.

Instead, a lump forms thick and heavy in Shouta's throat. Worse than that is the feeling of deep hollowness, of *lack* lingering just under the surface of his skin. It's something that Shouta hasn't felt in a long time; Hizashi clings like a human koala, and between him, Nemuri and Bastard, Shouta hasn't had problems with touch starvation in quite some time. Still, it's painfully familiar, and Shouta's heart drops at the thought of kind, effortlessly good Midoriya suffering from the same thing that brought him so much misery.

The sensation seems especially concentrated about Midoriya's head; Midoriya evidently would really like it if someone would ruffle his hair. Honestly, Shouta has restrained himself from tousling those bouncy green curls more than once due to not wanting to intrude on Midoriya's personal space or cross any boundaries. But it's clear that the Problem Child both needs and wants more positive touch in his life, and Shouta would be more than willing to help.

The feeling goes a bit deeper than touch starvation; it's as though someone is beginning to finally, *finally* heal a wound to Midoriya's very soul. As in the treatment of any old, neglected wound, it isn't exactly a comfortable experience, but at the same time, Shouta can feel that it brings a feeling of relief to Midoriya, as well as a desire, however offset by fear, to continue to heal.

Shouta swallows a lump to his throat that is all his own and resolves to help Midoriya as much as he can.

Shouta finds that resolution being strengthened as the absolute *clusterfuck* of revelations that is learning about what, exactly, Midoriya's middle school experience was like. The kid's been neglected by teachers for all of his life, and Shouta refuses to be yet another adult who fails him. The kid deserves *far* better than that.

Shouta has quite the to-do list, now. He needs to notify Nedzu of the situation, and figure out what, exactly they're going to do with Bakugo, since even if Midoriya insists that it's not his fault (which Shouta is *highly* skeptical of, the kid still has fucking *autonomy*), there's no way Bakugo can continue with this kind of behavior unchecked. After that, he'll need to rearrange Class 1-A's seating chart so that Bakugo and Midoriya aren't so close together, and notify the other teachers of the change so they can do the same thing with their own seating charts (as well as make sure that the two don't end up paired together in any exercises).

On top of that, Aizawa needs to arrange quirk counseling (and almost certainly regular counseling as well) for his Problem Child. He'll also need to completely revamp his approach to teaching Midoriya since he's been going at it with several underlying assumptions that have turned out to be entirely false.

And, of course, there's the matter of Aldera. The first step to dealing with Aldera will be to gather evidence of their many, many sins. After that… well, let's just say that he and Nedzu are going to drag those bastards kicking and screaming to justice. Shouta grins vindictively at the thought; while obviously such a corrupt and irresponsible institution needs to be prosecuted for reasons not motivated by his own emotions, he can also confess that part of his motivation is sheer *rage* at the knowledge that it was specifically *Midoriya Izuku*, his innocent and genuinely kind student who already has suffered through far too much. Shouta will be making sure that the process will be as difficult and painful for them as possible; he's going to make sure the experience is *hellish* for them.

Between everything on his to-do list, Shouta is sure the time he's able to allot to sleep will be drastically reduced, but he can't bring himself to even pretend to regret it. He would stop sleeping entirely if it meant he could take back the suffering his the kid's been through. As it is, he's more than willing to sacrifice this much if it means Midoriya will be able to heal.

Chapter End Notes

CW: touch starvation, mentioned self-harm, self-depreciation & nightmares, neglectful adults/teachers

This chapter was not planned in the original outline, hence the addition to the chapter count.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Izuku thinks that all of this is just kind of a Lot.

cw in end notes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku feels… exhausted. His hands are shaking a little because even though he knows that Aizawa-sensei's anger wasn't directed at him, it was still heady and dizzying to feel the heat of his rage, its sharpness and weight. It makes Izuku realize that all of the times he had *thought* Aizawa-sensei was angry at him—during the Quirk Apprehension Test when Izuku had almost broken his arm *again*, when he had found Izuku and Kacchan fighting at Ground Beta, when he told the class he should have expelled them all for what they did at Kamino Ward—he wasn't *actually* angry at him.

Not angry, just worried, Aizawa-sensei agrees, then pauses as he seems to realize that Izuku heard what he just thought. Izuku ducks his head, flushing, and stares more determinedly at his desk. This whole situation is so embarrassing for both of them, he thinks unhappily.

The bell rings, and Izuku slowly rises from his seat, pulling his backpack over his shoulders with trembling hands as he does so. Uraraka exchanges a glance with Todoroki and then steps towards him, a determined look on her face. Izuku quickly ducks out the door, pretending not to see her.

Izuku's stomach is churning like the ocean during a summer storm. When a third-year brushes too close to him in the hall, he jumps like a startled animal, his muscles buzzing live wires and his breathing just a little bit too fast. The sounds of shoes hitting the floor as someone hurries past him are claps of thunder bursting his eardrums, and the hall's light fixtures are as blindingly bright as flashes of lightning on the horizon. There's no way he can go to his next class like this—especially not when, Izuku realizes with another electric jolt of panic, it'll be with All Might. It's bad enough spilling his own secrets, but All Might's too… something in his chest shudders like a tree bent and buffeted by monsoon winds.

Izuku can feel Aizawa chewing over that last tidbit, rolling it around in his mind thoughtfully. *All Might's secrets?* he wonders.

Izuku bites his lip, hard. Knowing that Aizawa-sensei is curious, now, just makes everything so much *worse*. It makes him want to bury his teeth into his fist so deep that he tastes blood coppery and warm in his mouth.

When Izuku spots a men's bathroom, he ducks into it as quick as he can, locking the door behind him so he has at least an illusion of privacy. The empty bathroom is blessedly dark and silent and empty, and the tiles feel cool under his hands as he crawls his way over to curl up under one of the sinks.

Now that he's stopped moving, it's like the adrenaline and stress of... of *everything* these last few days crashes over him like a wave. He starts gasping like a man being dragged underwater desperately trying to pull in his last breaths, and his hands are shaking even worse than before. He can feel the panic sweeping him off to sea, can see the solidity of the shore disappearing behind the overlapping edges of the waves.

Hey, Aizawa-sensei says, voice gentle and durable, a sturdy rope for him to cling onto. *Come on. Breath in for one, two, three…* Aizawa-sensei coaches him through his breathing until the tingling at the tips of his fingers fades, until the world feels more present and real around him, he manages to sight shore once more.

Izuku moves to bite his thumb, just to tug him the rest of the way back to solid ground, just because he needs the taste of blood in his mouth like he needs food to eat, but then his mind flits to Aizawa-sensei and he stops, removing his knuckle from between his teeth.

Good, Aizawa-sensei thinks, sounding relieved. *How about if you try the grounding exercise I taught you last night instead?*

Aizawa-sensei's method takes longer than grounding himself using pain does, but he has to admit that this solution leaves him feeling… more settled. When he would ground himself using pain, it would draw him back to reality, yes, but it would almost be *too* far back into reality. The live-wire electricity of his muscles would be worse, and he'd be on edge for hours afterward, all of the details too bright and hard-edged. Aizawa's method, on the other hand, seems to smooth away his anxieties in a way that Izuku wouldn't have even thought possible if he hadn't experienced it himself.

Izuku has just finished noting the taste of the gum he chewed earlier still lingering on the tongue when Aizawa-sensei speaks up. *I've talked to Nedzu, and he said that you can skip Foundational Heroics today.*

Izuku curls into himself, stomach twisting. He can't afford to miss class—he's so far behind already. If only he was calmer, stronger, *better*, then Principal Nedzu wouldn't have to make allowances for him like this. If he had just been able to keep himself together, then Aizawa-sensei wouldn't have learned any of his dirty secrets, wouldn't be just one more fuck-up away from knowing everything secrets that Izuku had *promised* to keep. Izuku stuffs his fist into his mouth, sinking his teeth into the yielding flesh. He really, *really* needs to get his shit together.

Izuku can feel panic bubbling in Aizawa-sensei, a sort of helpless frustration that Izuku recognizes from when he stood there, watching as the Slime Villain choked Kacchan. Still, he speaks softly as he coaxes Izuku into easing his fist out of his mouth. *Hey, no. That's not what this is about. You're fine. You're not behind in class, and you don't need to beat yourself up over this. This is just so you don't have to expend so much effort constantly trying not to think anything you're not supposed to. Everyone needs breaks sometimes, even the best pro heroes.*

Slowly, Izuku releases his fist out of his mouth. As he does, he feels Aizawa-sensei letting out a breath that he seemed to have been holding. He feels something else too, something warm in the middle of their chest that comes with just a hint of a lump at the back of their throat. For some reason, Izuku thinks he might get a brief impression, an impulse really, of a hand reaching out and ruffling green curls. Izuku swallows, trying to push away the strange, unfamiliar feeling welling up within him. To his shame, his eyes well up with tears that he has to rub away with the heel of his hand.

...kid, Aizawa-sensei starts hesitantly.

Izuku braces himself against the slightly damp wall of the bathroom and pushes himself to his feet. He walks quickly, knowing that the closer he gets to Aizawa-sensei, the less of their thoughts will be shared.

The halls are empty, now; everyone has already headed off to their next class. He wonders what his friends will think when they see him gone. He supposes Principal Nedzu will probably notify All Might, and All Might can tell them, from there. Hopefully, none of them end up getting worried for no reason.

From Aizawa, so soft he thinks he might have imagined it, comes *seems like they're well within their rights to worry about you to me, Problem Child*. Izuku's brow twists in confusion. It's not like he's fighting a villain or anything, he's just dealing kind of badly with his stress. That's his own problem, and not anyone else's. For some reason, that seems to just make things worse; it feels like something is stuck in the back of their throats, hot and sticky and miserable. It's harder to tell, though, now that Izuku's almost reached the staff room.

Izuku hesitates at the door. He's been in here a few times, but only ever with All Might by his side, and the thought of having to look Aizawa-sensei in the eye after all of the embarrassing thoughts that he's heard… Izuku shudders. Izuku knows that he can't afford to be cowardly, not when he's going to be a hero soon so even though he's afraid, he draws in a deep breath and knocks.

There's a moment's wait, and then Present Mic pulls open the door, chirping out a cheerful "hello, little listener!" as he does so. He looks different, now—his leather jacket is replaced by a loose t-shirt, and his hair is pulled back into a bun, instead of gelled up and out of his face. He doesn't seem quite as loud, either. Izuku supposes that he's probably already dressed for the weekend since Foundational Heroics is the last class of the day. "Shou's waiting for you in his office." He gestures to the office in question, adding in a whisper, "Most of us teachers don't have offices, but Shouta insisted, since apparently, we're…" he makes quotation marks with his fingers, " 'too loud' and 'disrupt his work'."

Izuku can't help but let out a watery laugh, which in turn draws a wide, satisfied smile from Present Mic. "In you go," he says, gently pushing Izuku into Aizawa's office.

Luckily, Aizawa-sensei seems pretty busy with something on his computer. He gestures to a nearby couch and gruffly tells Izuku that he can set up there. Izuku obediently drops onto the couch. He's half-afraid that Aizawa-sensei is going to keep pressing him about what all, exactly, he's hiding, but aside from glancing in his direction every so often like he's checking that Izuku hasn't broken another bone or run into another villain while he wasn't looking, he stays immersed in his work.

Feeling a bit less tense, Izuku pulls out his homework and starts working through it. A pleasant sort of silence falls, one blissfully free of unintentionally shared thoughts. Izuku doesn't notice it, but his taut shoulders slowly slump back down from where they'd been pulled up

to his ears, and his posture gets a little bit looser. At some point, without noticing, he kicks off his shoes and curls his socked feet under him.

He's working on his math homework, tongue sticking out a little bit as he concentrates, when Aizawa-sensei passes on his way to drop off his paperwork. There's an odd sensation on the top of his head, and by the time that Izuku realizes that Aizawa-sensei seems to have just ruffled his hair, he's already gone. Izuku stares at the door for a long, stunned moment, then manages to shake himself and return to his math homework, although with a lingering sense of incredulity not particularly suited to trigonometry.

When Aizawa-sensei returns, he acts like nothing out of the ordinary has happened. He returns to his work and, when he looks up to Izuku staring at him blankly, even raises an eyebrow as though to say *what?* Flushing, Izuku turns his attention back to his work.

Eventually, the bell signaling the end of that period comes, and Izuku packs his things away. "Bye, Aizawa-sensei!" he calls as he leaves. Aizawa-sensei responds with a brief wave and a "see you soon, Problem Child." Feeling oddly light, Izuku weaves through the crowded corridors of UA. It's nice to have his homework all done so early, and the time being able to let his guard down fully has rejuvenated him, that must be it. He thinks that it won't be so hard for him to keep from thinking about anything incriminating, now that he's been able to have a break.

"There you are!" Uraraka cheers, appearing from behind him to sling an arm over his shoulders. Her other arm rises to give him a gentle noogie. Somehow, the motion reminds him of Aizawa-sensei ruffling his hair earlier that afternoon, and he blushes.

"Are you going to come with us to hang out after school today?" Asui asks as she falls into step with him.

"We shouldn't put pressure on Midoriya-kun!" Iida says, making a chopping motion with his hand. "Considering what All Might said about him being affected by a quirk, he may need rest and relaxation!"

"He'd been skipping out on hanging out with us since before today, though," Asui points out bluntly. It's not accusatory, but the words still make Izuku flush. He waves his hands around like he's trying to dispel their speculation and, before he can think his words through,

blurts out, “I’d love to hang out with you today!”

Part of Izuku regrets the hasty decision considering the increased likelihood of thinking about his friend’s secrets, but he also just… doesn’t feel as worried about the whole thing as he did before. And he really has missed spending time with his friends.

“Wonderful!” Uraraka cheers, sweeping away any lingering thoughts about the telepathic bond.

In fact, Izuku hardly spares the bond a thought for the rest of the afternoon. He doesn’t end up thinking about his friend’s secrets, either; instead, he’s engrossed in trying to think up good arguments for why cold soba should *not* be a Dorito’s flavor, for fuck’s sake Todoroki why would you even think up a concept like that, that's honestly *disturbing*.

Whenever he does happen to notice the link, all that he feels is a little bit of extra warmth in his chest, and an amusement that isn’t only his own as Izuku thinks of ever more elaborate and analytical arguments to use against Todoroki.

Izuku returns to the dorms tired but happy. He eats dinner with his friends, and for the first time in several days, he thinks only about how tasty the food is and how nice the company, instead of having to come up with facts to throw towards the bond as a sort of smokescreen. Still, the long, emotional day has tired Izuku out, so as soon as he finishes dinner, he heads up to his room to go to sleep.

Izuku curls up under the covers, resting his head on his pillow. The familiar feeling of the smooth fabric against his cheek reminds him of trying to fall asleep the previous night, of Aizawa-sensei coaching him through grounding exercises, of—Izuku flushes and buries his head in his pillow once more. That had been *so* embarrassing.

Not as embarrassing as Aizawa-sensei seeing his nightmare had been, though. Izuku twists the fabric of his bedspread between his crooked fingers. He knows that Aizawa-sensei had said it was natural to have nightmares, that he wasn’t weak for it, that he wouldn’t judge him, but just—hasn’t Aizawa-sensei seen enough of that? Over time, Izuku has built up a sort of exoskeleton around him, a thick armor made of the scabs that cover his oldest, most painful wounds. Aizawa-sensei is slowly peeling it away, leaving Izuku soft-shelled and raw and *so, so* vulnerable. Izuku shudders. He *hates* it.

Impulsively, Izuku pushes himself out of bed. He pulls his blanket

around his shoulders like a cape and pads out of his room and up the stairs. When he reaches the door to Aizawa-sensei's room, he doesn't even have to knock; Aizawa-sensei opens it and steps aside before his fist so much as touches the door. "You can take the couch," he says.

Izuku nods. He dimly registers that he should be feeling terribly embarrassed right about now, but he's just… so tired. Instead, he lets him flop forward face-first onto the couch, which makes Aizawa chuckle softly. His blanket isn't even fully on him, but the couch is surprisingly soft, and he knows he doesn't have to worry anymore, so he just sort of… leans his head against one of the armrests and drifts off.

The smell of eggs cooking tempts him awake again the following morning. Izuku rolls off the couch and pads into the kitchen. Aizawa-sensei's eyes are focused intently on the eggs that he's frying, which allows Izuku a moment to take in the strange sight of his teacher without his capture weapon and with his hair pulled up into a ponytail. It's almost as disorienting as seeing Present Mic without his leather jacket and with his hair down had been.

"Good morning," Aizawa-sensei says, carefully flipping the eggs over. A bit of the hot oil spatters his hand, and he starts to swear, then abruptly cuts himself off. Izuku can see the exact moment that he remembers exactly how curse-word laden Izuku's internal monologue had been, and then he shrugs and returns to where he'd left off mid-word. Izuku stifles a laugh.

Something warm and furry brushes against Izuku's legs and Izuku looks down to see a round grey cat rubbing up against him. Upon meeting his eyes, it meows insistently.

"That's Bastard," Aizawa-sensei tells him. "Don't listen to what he tells you, he's already had his breakfast this morning."

Izuku bends down to pet him. For all of his supposed hunger, Bastard is very friendly, nuzzling his hand obligingly.

"He likes to be scratched under his chin," Aizawa-sensei says, and even though they're in the same room, the affection blooming in Aizawa's chest is so strong that Izuku can still feel a dull echo of it. Obediently Izuku moves to scratch under Bastard's chin. For a cat who he named after an insult, Aizawa-sensei seems really fond of him, Izuku notes. For some reason, that makes him think of Aizawa-sensei's own nickname for him, Problem Child. Does that mean—Izuku flushes

and buries his face in Bastard's soft fur, forcing his thoughts down and away. Thinking that thought had been like touching the rawness underneath the peeled-away exoskeleton.

Aizawa-sensei sets a plate down at the table with a soft clink, and Izuku rises to join him at the table. Oddly enough, Aizawa doesn't have any eggs of his own, just his usual jelly packet. Did... did Aizawa-sensei make eggs just for Izuku?

Izuku doesn't realize he's staring blankly at his plate until Aizawa-sensei asks dryly, "are you going to eat those, or are you determined to think of more facts about them first?"

Izuku flushes and starts eating.

"You were signed up to go home this weekend," Aizawa-sensei says, "but I'm assuming that you'd prefer to stay here, now." Izuku nods quickly. It's just so much less stressful when he doesn't have to censor himself, and he can always go home next weekend, anyway.

Aizawa-sensei nods. "I'll send Nedzu an email."

They eat quietly for a while after that, and then Aizawa-sensei stands, taking away Izuku's dirty plate as he does. "I—I can wash that," Izuku says, but Aizawa just waves him off. "It's fine."

They don't really talk much after that. Izuku plays with Bastard for a little while, then catches up on some hero news that he's missed. Aizawa-sensei's working on a case of some sort, one that seems to upset him judging by the way he keeps frowning, and the frustration Izuku can't help but feel even with how weak the link is right now. Aizawa-sensei is already uncomfortably close to Izuku as it is, and Izuku has no interest in making things worse, so he doesn't try to unravel the hot, tangled bundle of thoughts and emotions he can distantly feel.

Even with how comfortably exposed Izuku is feeling, the time he spends with Aizawa-sensei is nice. It's peaceful, in the same way that sitting in silence with Todoroki is peaceful. They eat lunch together and visit Eri at the hospital again that afternoon, and then later that night, they sit on the couch watching the evening news together. Aizawa-sensei starts off grading assignments, but when Izuku starts mumbling different theories, he sets his papers aside and turns his attention to Izuku instead of his work. He seems to think that Izuku's actually quite skilled at it, which... Izuku doesn't want to think about how it makes him feel too deeply, because the actual act of feeling it

been dangerous enough.

Izuku sleeps on the couch that night too, and the next morning, Aizawa-sensei makes him eggs again. This time, he lets Izuku be the one to feed Bastard. Izuku can't help laugh a little, at how eager the cat is to gobble down all the food.

During lunch, Aizawa-sensei tells him that he'll be going out for a while that afternoon. Based on the tension in Aizawa's posture when he talks about his errand, Izuku assumes that it's something to do with the bit of hero work that's upsetting him, so he resolves to try to purposefully ignore anything he hears over the bond so that whoever involved gets the privacy that they deserve.

It's probably for the best, considering that how bad just the things that Izuku *can't* ignore are. There's a twisting, nauseous feeling in Aizawa-sensei's stomach and his leashed anger from earlier, along with the same burn in their breastbone that Izuku gets whenever Eri talks about the things Chisaki did. Clearly, the case isn't the kind of thing Izuku would want to know too much about, anyway.

Just like before, Izuku avoids touching the hot, snarled core of thoughts and emotions twisted tightly in Aizawa-sensei. At least, he does until it gets so bad that even with his best efforts, some of Aizawa-sensei's thoughts are spilling over into Izuku's side of things.

Lying for attention? Izuku can hear Aizawa-sensei hissing. *You think he's* lying for attention*? Fucking hell, that's the biggest piece of bullshit I've heard in* years. *Hell, I* wish *he was lying for attention, that would be a thousand times better than knowing that he genuinely did go through this!*

Izuku's chest feels cramped because of how full it is with borrowed anger, and his eyes burn like Aizawa-sensei is just barely avoiding activating his quirk. He can physically *feel* Aizawa-sensei forcing down his anger, forcing himself to take a deep breath before he asks, *"and what makes you think that?"*

Izuku doesn't know what the person says in response, but whatever it is, it makes Aizawa-sensei's anger flare like an incandescent lightbulb blazing with a sudden surge of electricity. *What, you think saying that 'no actually, what I really meant was that he* deserved *to have Bakugo beat him up because he kept antagonizing him' is going to make me* less *angry?* Aizawa-sensei rages.

Aizawa-sensei is saying more, cursing out whoever it is that he's talking to very thoroughly, but Izuku doesn't hear any of it. Aizawa-

sensei just said… just said Bakugo so that means… that this is about *him*. Aizawa-sensei didn't forget about Aldera, not like he'd been half-hoping that he would. The case that he's been working on this whole weekend… it's about what Aldera did to Izuku.

Izuku covers his face. Aizawa-sensei isn't here to see him—no one is—but the sense of exposure, of vulnerability, is so great that he can't help it. The patch of scab covering one of his older wounds has been fully yanked off, now, and the bloody old gash he's nursed for years is bared to open air.

By the time Izuku manages to gather himself enough to tune back into what Aizawa-sensei is thinking, he's gotten off on a new tangent. *Lack of funding?* He hisses. *What, do you need an extra two million yen a year to employ the use of your conscience?* There's a pause, like Aizawa-sensei is listening to the person retorting, and then, angrier than ever, *that would still* never *excuse what you did to my son.*

Izuku chokes on the water he'd been drinking. *hol—y SHIT*, he thinks, devolving into a violent coughing fit. *Did Aizawa-sensei just—just—* He desperately tries to keep himself from devolving into hysterical, disbelieving laughter; considering he's still struggling to catch his breath, it would probably cause him to choke yet again. There's no *fucking* way.

He can feel Aizawa-sensei pause, seeming to lose the tunnel vision his rage had trapped him in. *Ah shit,* Izuku can hear him thinking to himself with a sense of dawning horror, *that... is probably the kid. Who... probably just heard that.*

Izuku gives up the battle against his hysterical laughter. *I'm hallucinating,* Izuku concludes cheerfully, *I've finally had my mental breakdown! That's it, everyone! Pack it up, Shigaraki, because I've finally snapped and it's not even because of you!*

Izuku gives his chest one last rapid wallop to dislodge a lingering bit of water and tries to calm himself. This is fine, he tells himself. He can just forget this whole thing happened because—well, because there's no fucking way. Aizawa-sensei clearly meant it a different way.

Fuck, but I didn't, Izuku can hear Aizawa-sensei thinking quietly.

Izuku balls up his blanket and screams into it.

Hey, at least I have the tapes now, Aizawa-sensei reflects a bit desperately. *I'll be home soon and this will be over for both of us.* Izuku

gets the same vague sensation from earlier of an impulse to reach out and pat his head, this time a great deal more clearly and distinctly. He screams into his balled-up blanket again, extra loud this time.

Chapter End Notes

CW: panic attacks, self harm, bullying and neglect by adults to step in and do anything about that bullying, victim-blaming

Sorry for how long it's taken me to update, I got caught up in the whole return to school. I hope you enjoy this chapter, though!

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The last installment of this fic.

cw in the end notes as always.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku can always identify the moment when momentum shifts irreversibly.

He knows it by the hint of sweetness on his tongue when Kacchan's irritation tips into bloodlust. He knows it by the brittle creak of his weary bones right before they shatter. He knows it by the feeling in his belly when he stood on the ledge and tilted forward, approaching the point of no return only to pull back at the last possible second.

Just like on the rooftop, Izuku is very, very near the point beyond which he cannot pull back. He can *sense* it in the thrum in the marrow of his fragmented bones, can *feel* it in the pumping of his blood, in the way his pulse beats out the quick tempo of a man whose feet rest on a fulcrum. It is there, too, in the taste in his mouth, the clinging tang of the ozone that always heralds lightning.

Izuku has been treading close to danger for a while, now. He has let his walls down, has spilled secrets that should have stayed bundled up deep within. He has lost his exoskeleton of scabs and old, clotted blood, has had his armor peeled back until his raw, soft skin is bare to the air. Like careful fingers passing through the tip of a candle's flame, he has brushed against the inner core of Aizawa-sensei's mind, has felt a tenderness so deep and full that it hurts, has felt anger bound back behind a will of steel, has had his support lay over Izuku's shoulders like a heavy blanket.

Izuku has gotten close to him. Dangerously, dangerously close. He has gotten close enough to fear, close enough to wonder if this will the time he slips, if this is the time he leans too far forward and tumbles forward to shatter himself upon unforgiving concrete. But now he is not wondering anymore, because this is not theory, is not an idle threat but a blade right against his jugular. If he does not change his course, the momentum will carry him and he *will* fall, no idle

wondering about it.

He knows this because as much as Izuku tries to deny it, as much as he tries to reason the truth away and pretend that the lies he tells himself are reality… Aizawa-sensei really *did* mean what he said.

That will never excuse what you did to my son, he had said. It had been a merciless ruling, been an iron-clad declaration laid down by the very incarnation of cold-bladed wrath, been the ringing of the executioner's bell. It had been a promise that Aizawa-sensei will never, never let the culprits who turned their faces aside as Izuku gained scars, as his shoulders bent forward into a permanent smallness and his eyes grew glassy—that he will never, never let them slip away, that he will never let them taste the peace they denied Izuku.

(And fuck but *why* does that make a lump well in his throat? He had thought that he hadn't wanted Aizawa-sensei to stick his nose into his business, that he hadn't cared about what happened at Aldera anymore, that he didn't want anyone touching old wounds. So why does the thought of someone being angry on his behalf feel so much like he's finally standing under an overhang after an eternity battered by hail?)

What Aizawa-sensei had said had been more than a weapon pointed at his—no—Izuku's—no—*their* enemies.

It had been a twofold promise—not just a promise of raining hellfire down upon Aldera, but a promise to Izuku. Because as much as Izuku hates to admit it, but Aizawa-sensei's words had rung with—he won't say *truth* because that sounds so *objective*, like any sane, impartial person would say he's Aizawa-sensei's son—Aizawa-sensei's words had rung with... with *conviction*, and Izuku knows, deep down in his bones, that Aizawa-sensei has a much different meaning of "son" than Hisashi did.

A meaning of son that means that he will gently, lovingly peel away whatever remains of Izuku's protective hard shell, that he will learn every last secret Izuku has to tell, that all of Izuku's enemies will become *his*, too. Izuku will never be able to have a nightmare without Aizawa-sensei coming to soothe him, never be able to sink his teeth into his fist without Aizawa-sensei fighting him every step of the way, will never be able to destroy himself in peace again.

If Izuku lets the momentum carry him, lets himself tip forward any further, that is the future that will rise to meet him. That is the hard

concrete he will shatter himself upon.

Izuku lets out a shaky sigh. No matter what strange allure the alternative may have—it must be some variant of the call of the void, because why else would he crave his own vulnerability, his own weakness?—he knows what the correct response is.

Izuku will step back from the ledge instead of leaning forward. He will not let this fulcrum shift, will not let this momentum carry him beyond the bounds of his own dominion. He will not shatter himself upon unforgiving concrete. He will not let that foolish longing for the kiss of wind on his bare skin deprive him of his protection, will not let a chink form in his armor. Instead, he will turn away, swing the other direction and direct the force that almost driven him to destruction back on itself until he comes out the other side of this stronger than ever before.

Piece by piece, he will rebuild his armor again. The slick wet of his old sluggishly bleeding wounds will clot into new scabs, and no one will touch the rawness that lies beneath. Even if someone slinks their way into his very mind, he will be tougher, the next time, harder to crack. No matter what happens, he won't let anyone in again.

Izuku cannot take back the secrets he has already given, but he will guard the rest that more fiercely. He will bury them so deep that even he half-forgets them. He will never so much as breath a word, never let them come near enough his tongue that they might slip from his mouth into another's waiting ears. He will be as a locked box with its own key contained within is.

Self-sufficient and self-sustaining. No one's son.

That is what he must do to become strong. So why does the thought of it make Izuku's stomach churn?

Izuku rolls over, burying his face into the arm of Aizawa-sensei's couch. Sleep will crystallize his resolve, he is sure.

Izuku heads out early the next morning before Aizawa-sensei gets up. He ignores the odd, tight feeling in his chest, ignores the part of him that can't help but think of eggs on his plate and Bastard's silky-soft fur under his fingers. The same tiny, insipid part of him, Izuku thinks with a sneer, that would pry his armor off just for the feel of the air on his bare skin, that would jump off a cliff for the bare moment when it felt like he was weightless.

He ignores, too, the moment when Aizawa-sensei sees the empty couch, when he registers that Izuku is gone. *...I guess I don't need to cook eggs this morning,* Aizawa-sensei thinks, and Izuku tries to tell himself that it's a good thing, that Aizawa-sensei is glad to have less work to do, but he can't fool himself because the link means that he can feel the hollowness in Aizawa-sensei's chest, the bare hint of a lump in his throat.

Izuku hunches his shoulders. It's for the best, he reminds himself. This is the path that he needs to take to be strong. And if it hurts… doesn't it make it worth so much more if his successes are the fruits of pain and suffering instead of ease? Hadn't Izuku been so awed, so impressed when he realized how much pain All Might hid behind and between each brilliant smile?

Izuku will lay himself down on the altar of heroism a hundred times if it means he can save a single person more. This is the role he plays—the willing sacrifice, the human shield who will take endless blows with a reassuring smile. And so if he defines himself by his willingness to suffer, his ability to mask his pain with an easy grin—is that not all right and good?

Izuku can feel Aizawa-sensei's stomach twisting, but it's easy enough to ignore; he has a lot of practice ignoring things that hurt him.

...that was not how Izuku had thought of heroism when he was a child. No, it had not been how he thought of it at all.

He had thought of heroes as being the ones who made sure no sacrifice was necessary. He had thought of heroes as being the ones who destroyed the bloodied altar, who made sure no blows would be thrown at *anyone*, who prevented suffering so irrevocably that the villains couldn't inflict any pain on the world at all.

...but that was a childish dream, the mindset of someone who did not understand that everything has a price, that the only thing you have to bargain with is your own throbbing, still-beating heart.

As a child, Izuku had only seen All Might's smile, and not what lay behind it. He has not glimpsed the blood clenched behind those gleaming teeth, had not seen the tears in those joy-crinkled eyes. He had admired All Might for succeeding with the aid of his joy, not despite his pain.

That younger Izuku would be devastated to learn the truth, he thinks wryly. He would be devastated, too, to think that Izuku's own smiles

are hollow—and even more devastated to realize that Izuku prefers them that way, that he is purposefully making himself miserable.

Izuku slows to a stop, his mind going back over those last few words with something like incredulity. Is he? Is he purposefully choosing to make himself miserable?

In the momentary quiet, Izuku can distantly feel that Aizawa-sensei seems to be holding his breath.

Izuku shakes himself, bites his lip hard as he tries to gather his resolve. If he is, it's only because this is the only way of doing things that he knows. As fucked up as it is, he only knows how to smile if it's a weapon against pain, a foil against a greater sadness within. The only way that he knows how to be a hero is to be a sacrifice.

Except… part of him rebels against that, even now.

Part of him can't help but remember the wild joy that overtaken him in the battle with Overhaul. His smile had felt like the flash of a tempered blade still hot from the forge, a weapon against pain, yes, but one turned outwards. A weapon intended to vanquish the monsters without instead of within, because that same joy burning through him had been so white-hot and furious it had seemed that his own cares and bothers had gone up in smoke like fire melting away impurities in metal.

It had felt so *good*. Like the taste of victory, like purifying fire in his veins, like resting his feet on a solid foundation of stone after ages tiptoeing on rotten, hollow wood. Like what a young, childish Izuku had thought All Might was—except made into reality.

Maybe, Izuku thinks slowly, he should give his younger self more credit. Maybe he was right all along. Maybe joy is worth more than tribulation. Maybe it is nobler to endure the strange, unfamiliar agony of healing than to sink into the familiar, comfortable anguish of wallowing in his own suffering. Maybe instead of hollowing himself out to create a brittle, hard shell, he should build himself into something solid all of the way through.

That feeling of swinging momentum is in the air again, and this time Izuku sees that this decision is not, had he had thought, a jump off a building. It is not him shattering himself onto hard concrete for a moment's joy. No, it is a trust fall from a burning building, a brief moment of lost control, of weightlessness and absolute terror, to ensure a long and bright future free of the dark smoke that is filling

his lungs and choking him.

And Izuku? Izuku is willing to take that step, willing to let himself fall, willing to trust that Aizawa-sensei will catch him.

He can feel Aizawa-sensei's chest spasm in what might be a sob. *I will,* he promises.

Izuku turns on his heel and starts walking back.

As Izuku walks, he pulls out his phone and starts tapping out a text to All Might. *I want to tell Aizawa-sensei. Is that okay?* His fingers tremble, just a little bit. He can't really believe that he's going to do this—but he also can't believe he waited so long.

The reply comes unexpectedly quickly. *Of course, my boy. It's your quirk.*

Izuku swallows, staring. *your quirk.* It's always been *All Might's quirk* to him, but… it *is* his quirk, isn't it? Izuku stares down at his crooked fingers, thinks of the way his pupils stay white, now, even when One for All isn't activated, of Nana's hand on his shoulder in the dreamscape.

He grins, bright and fierce. It is his quirk, isn't it? *His* quirk that curls in his belly, that licks fiery-hot at his bones, that leaves lightning crackling between his fingers. Overpowered and dangerous and quite possibly haunted and *his*.

H— haunted? Izuku is close enough to Aizawa-sensei that he shouldn't be able to hear him, but evidently his thoughts are so strong that even physical closeness isn't enough to quell them.

Izuku puts his hand on Aizawa-sensei's door. "Don't worry," he says. "I'm going to tell you *everything*."

Chapter End Notes

> cw: implied/referenced suicide, a lot of... rather violent metaphors (ex. fire, blades, blood and scabbing)
>
> I hope you guys enjoyed this! I've been rather nervous about finishing this fic since it got all of this attention. I hope you're not too terribly disappointed— I was thinking of getting more into the OFA reveal at the end there and whatnot, but the emotional core of the story had already finished and I just felt like it was

better to end it there. Anyway, thank you all for reading, and remember: if you ever have someone inside of your head, think about egg facts.

EDIT 8/10/2021: I've gotten so many people asking for egg facts that I've actually compiled some in this comment. I hope you guys enjoy.

Some day in the very near future:

Me, opening the fridge: did you know that brown eggs cost more because the chickens that lay brown eggs are bigger? Also, some chickens lay blue eggs because of a disease that led to a mutation in their DNA. Also also, this one chef found that if you feed chickens a diet high in red peppers, it would make their egg yolks strawberry colored.

My brother: How do you know all of this?

Me: *dramatic flashback*

Works inspired by this one

Hypocrisy by EdithWinters

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!